

After 54 Years, New Mexico Secrets of Albert and Laura

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The New Mexico desert has had 54 years to conceal the last traces of the murder of a Du Quoin couple and their East St. Louis traveling companions.

Shortly, the release of 6,000 pages of FBI investigation on the deaths of Albert Heberer, then 52 and wife Laura, then 48, back in May 1935 should shed some light on this celebrated unsolved mystery.

An Albuquerque, N.M. broadcaster hopes to use the information—released under the federal Freedom of Information Act—along with the still-open files of New Mexico authorities to make one last stab at solving the case.

Larry Barker of KOAT-TV says it remains a much talked about case and “somewhere out there” is the answer.

“The FBI is releasing a few of the 6,000 pages at a time,” said Barker.

The Heberers completely vanished from the New Mexico landscape on May 22, 1935 as did their traveling companions, Mr. and Mrs. George Lorius of East St. Louis. They had been on vacation in the southwest when they were presumed robbed and murdered and their bodies buried somewhere in the New Mexico desert.

Heberer was a Du Quoin barber, operating out of a storefront at 6 North Oak.

The case commanded the attention of not only the Federal Bureau of Investigation, but no fewer than 300 New Mexico and Texas law enforcement officers, some 2,000 searchers and the governors of New Mexico, Texas, and Illinois.

In fact, vowing to solve the most mysterious murder in New Mexico statehood history, Gov. Clyde Tingsley walked the desert himself in search of the loose dirt that would mark the makeshift grave.

That grave was never found. In fact, the New Mexico winds have

long since combed out the wrinkles in the case and the Rio Grande River has long since washed away the last traces of the crime.

**Heberers Last
Seen May 22, 1935**

Broadcaster Barker says the FBI and New Mexico police files contain the last known word on the Heberer whereabouts—a postcard which Mrs. Heberer dated May 22, 1935 and mailed back to Du Quoin. The time on the card was “11 a.m.”

The file also contains pictures of the couple used in the search and the burned remains of personal effects found in the ashes of a bonfire used to try and dispose of the Heberers' luggage.

The only thing the file doesn't contain is the answer.

Heberer's brother, Phillip, and friends of the Lorius' reported the four missing after they failed to return to Du Quoin on their announced schedule.

On May 28, 1935 Dallas police reported to wire services that the car stolen from the four had turned up. Blood stains and hair were found on the left door of the car.

Authorities also began collecting a string of 16 \$10 travelers checks which the thief had forged Lorius' name to and was spending across New Mexico and Texas. They were some of the \$400 in checks which Lorius had taken with him on the trip.

Mrs. Lorius' ring is said to have turned up after two highway men paid \$4.75 to a sheep herder who said he found it along the roadside “at a place where it appears that someone

changed a tire.”

**Evidence Begins
To Surface in Case**

Texas authorities quickly began to pull together interesting details of the disappearance, none of which helped to solve the case.

A border guard at Fort Hancock, Tex. remembers checking the drivers' license of a man claiming to be “George Lorius” at a border crossing. The man who had presumably stolen the ID from Lorius and the Heberers said he was just crossing back into the U.S. from Jaureze, Mexico “where I have been drunk”, he told police. Police, not yet knowing of the alleged murder, released the man.

It was also determined that the Heberers were last seen in Vaughn, New Mexico by people at a restaurant on May 22.

A tire salesman, G.L. McBeth, told the FBI he came upon a man in the Heberer car “who was in a nervous state along the roadside.” The car had gone off into a ditch and after McBeth helped pull the car out, the man sped away.

The investigation continued on up into mid-June and New Mexico's governor Tingley said a “hot tip” of a “possible grave” in the New Mexico desert caused him to walk the desert himself and eventually cally out 2,000 national guardsmen to search what later turned out to be a 3,000 square mile “triangle” of desert. The grave was never found.

On June 19th, Illinois Gov. Henry Horner posted a \$500 reward for information in the Du Quoin couple's death.



Desert Refuse Give Up Heberer Disappearance

of FBI Investigation on Du Quoin Case, As TV trail of Unsolved Mystery

The search also resulted in dozens of prank letters. Heberer's brother Phillip received a letter from a man in New Mexico claiming to be a deputy and a private detective. He wrote Heberer saying that he had spent days investigating the case and "my funds are exhausted." He asked Heberer for more money to continue the search. The man was a fake.

As the investigation continued a picture of the man who stole the Heberer vehicle and presumably was responsible for their murder came together. One police report described him as a "young, slightly built man."

The description of the man resulted in no fewer than 40 persons being detained and at least three short-lived arrests being made in the case. All suspects were freed after it was determined they were not involved in the murder case.

One man who was arrested was Jack Sullivan of Nevada, Missouri who had been in New Mexico about the same time as the Heberers. Police wired Missouri authorities and asked them to detain Sullivan, then 16. Police also arrested a 36-year-old man named Clement Sikes of Socorro New Mexico "who resembled the man who cashed some of the travelers checks" according to one account. The man was arrested while trying to rob a drug store.

Cowboys Find Burned Luggage

On July 1st headlines across the nation proclaimed that the solution to the case was near after two

cowboys—Wayla Fillingen and his brother Edward—found the burned Heberer luggage in the ashes of a bonfire in the New Mexico about four miles outside of Albuquerque.

Broadcaster Larry Barker says there remain those who know where the luggage was found and took him to that spot recently. That area is now actually incorporated into modern-day Albuquerque.

Among the personal effects found in the luggage was the burned remains of a \$1 bill which Heberer had always carried for luck and which was a reminder of his beginnings in the barber business. In the July 1, 1935 edition of the Du Quoin Evening Call, an itemized list of the properties was even published in a front page story because of the "revelation" that the find had created.

Also found was a beer bottle which was a match to one found in the abandoned Heberer vehicle, perhaps linking the thief as the murderer.

Personal effects included: There were bits of East St. Louis newspapers, a charred can of Ovaltine, several ladies' dress buckles, the skeleton of a roll of Kodak film, two mirrors, the frame of a purse and a man's handbag, a metal pencil, a thermos jug, a can of talc, a jar of ointment, a jar of Vick's Vapo-Rub, a silver thimble, a bunch of keys, spectacles case, a pair of rimless reading glasses and lenses melted out of shape, odds and ends of clothes and a pen which bore the name of "Majestic Coal Co."

Lorius' business card and Mrs. Heberer's personal calling card

were also found.

There were also postal cards and scenic pictures of the area. But, again, there were no signs of the Heberers.

The site was not too far from the Rio Grande River and authorities feared the bodies may have been dumped in the river.

Note Found Two Months Later

Headlines again screamed of breakthroughs in the case on July 27th—two months after the incident—after a handwritten note was found along the highway. It said, "Tourists may be found at the Collidge Dam." It went on to say something about "they may be alive, they may be dead."

Again, a search of the area turned up nothing.

Leads Begin To Dry Up In Later Days

One newspaper account in August, one in September and two more before year's end elude to an ongoing investigation in the case, but no information which would substantiate their murders of the persons involved in them.

The Heberers would be over 100 years old today and most close relatives in the case any many of the investigators in the case have died. Distant relatives remain in the Du Quoin area and the Heberer name stretches from Marion, Ill. to Coulterville and on west toward Mascoutah.

But, for most descendants, Albert and Laura Heberer are now merely part of a much larger family tree.

But, there are those in New Mexico, like broadcaster Barker, who know the murder can be solved. The grave is out there. His aging murderer may still be alive.

Barker says sons of law enforcement officers still talk about the case. They want it solved. They want the desert to finally breathe forward the solution to one of the nation's great unsolved mysteries.